

Best Management Practices

MISSOURI DEPARTMENT OF CONSERVATION



Bald eagle

Haliaeetus leucocephalus

Common name • Bald eagle

Scientific name • *Haliaeetus leucocephalus*

State status • Endangered

Ecology

Bald eagles are common migrants and winter residents throughout Missouri and are rare breeders along some of the major rivers and larger reservoirs in the state. During winter, they congregate near rivers and reservoirs with open water and often near large concentrations of waterfowl. Wintering eagles usually occupy river habitats between November 15 and March 1 where they use large diameter (> 12 inches diameter at breast height) cottonwoods, sycamores and other riparian trees as daytime perches and night roosts. They usually perch within a riparian corridor or along lake shores where there is limited human activity.

In addition to feeding on fish, bald eagles also feed on dead or crippled waterfowl, small mammals and carrion. During winter nights, bald eagles may congregate at communal roosts, sometimes traveling as far as 20 kilometers (12 miles) from feeding areas to roost sites. The period from January 1 to March 1 is important for initiating nesting activity; March 1 to May 15 is the most critical time for incubation and rearing of young. Females lay one to three eggs per clutch, and in Missouri, usually two chicks survive to fledging.

Reasons for Decline

Historically, bald eagles were found in all 50 states except Hawaii and nested in 45 of the 48 contiguous states. Declines in populations of bald eagles took place throughout the United States from the 1950s into the early 1970s. Eagle population declines are due to loss of riparian habitat, human disturbances such as shooting, poisoning, trapping and pesticide-induced reproductive failure. Eagles fed on fish that were contaminated with the pesticide DDT. As this pesticide accumulated in the eagles, it caused them to lay thin-shelled eggs that broke under the weight of the incubating parent before hatching. After DDT was banned in 1972, populations of eagles stabilized and slowly began to increase. Currently, however, habitat loss is a concern for bald eagles. Land use changes and activities that adversely alter roost sites may disrupt roosting areas for eagles.

Specific Recommendations

Bald eagles are sensitive environmental indicators, and their protection and management is important for many wildlife species.

- Project activities should not occur within 1,500 meters of areas where bald eagles are nesting (January 1 - July 15) or over-wintering (November 15 - March 1).
- Dams and impoundment structures should not be constructed in those rivers where bald eagles occur.
- Avoid clearing dead or live trees (> 12 inches diameter at breast height) along streams, rivers and wetlands that could be used by eagles for roosting or nesting.
- Dispose of chemicals, toxic waste, garbage and wash water from trucks in areas designated for such wastes. These sites should be away from sinkholes, streams and other bodies of water.

General Recommendations

Refer to "Management Recommendations for Construction Projects Affecting Missouri Streams and Rivers" and "Management Recommendations for Construction Projects Affecting Missouri Wetlands."

Information Contacts

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Disclaimer

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